WAR IN THE GULF

THE POLITICS OF COALITION WARFARE

THESIS: The Gulf War demonstrated the validity of Clausewitz's teaching that military means must be subordinated to the political end.

LTC Carl A. Strock
Seminar F
 COL Richard Haney
 DR Charles Stevenson
6 November 1992

Report Documentation Page

1. REPORT DATE **06 NOV 1992**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **06-11-1992 to 06-11-1992**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **War in the Gulf. The Politics of Coalition Warfare**	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **National War College,300 5th Avenue,Fort Lesley J. McNair,Washington,DC,20319-6000**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
see report

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES **10**	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**			

WAR IN THE GULF

THE POLITICS OF COALITION WARFARE

The Key to Success

The stunning victory in the Gulf War stands out as a shining example of the proper place for politicians in war -- just turn it over to the military professionals and get out of the way. But was this really the key to our success? Hardly. In fact virtually every important decision on the conduct of the war was based on political objectives and measured in terms of the ultimate "shape of the peace" that would follow our inevitable victory.

The political basis for decision making in war is hardly a new concept. However, it was only formally acknowledged and expanded upon by the great Prussian military theorist, Carl Von Clausewitz in his classic treatise, *On War*, first published in 1832. Clausewitz refused to comment on even the most elementary military problem until he understood the political objective in the application of force. The military strategy adopted during the Gulf War was based on and constantly evaluated against the political objectives as expressed in the capitals of the coalition.

The unique aspect of the Gulf War, and the one which this paper addresses, is the extent to which US military strategy accommodated the political objectives of the other coalition members.

Political Objectives

The fact that it was a coalition effort added considerable complexity to both the

formulation of and almost as importantly the statement of political objectives. The United

States, as the unquestioned leader of the coalition, approached the problem by dealing with two

sets of political objectives, those stated and those unstated. The formal stated objectives formed

a common denominator[1] on which all members could agree. These were (1) withdrawal of all

Iraqi forces from Kuwait (2) restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait (3) release of

all detainees and (4) peace and stability in the region.

The unstated US objectives were those which might be politically sensitive at home or

abroad. Among these were: the uninterrupted flow of oil; neutralization of Iraq's offensive

military capability to include destruction of all nuclear, chemical and biological warfare

production, storage, and delivery means; and if possible the ouster of Saddam Hussein.

The Arab coalition shared both sets of objectives, albeit for slightly different reasons,

with the notable exception of the ouster of Saddam. In the Arab view, a Saddam confined to

his borders and divested of his offensive military power was a far more comfortable prospect

than a state of chaos ripe for exploitation by Iran or Turkey. A further Arab objective was to

minimize the residual influence of foreign powers in the region[2].

Importance of the Coalition

The cornerstone of US political strategy was the maintenance of the coalition through

emphasis on the stated objectives while avoiding any public reference to those unstated. The

maintenance of the coalition was a vital military[3] and political objective for both short- and

long-term reasons. For the short term war termination objectives, it is conceivable that the

United States could have acted unilaterally to expel Iraq from Kuwait, but it would have been

extremely difficult without access to the ports, airfields, marshaling areas, coastal waters and airspace of the coalition members -- not to mention their military and financial contributions. Without this burden sharing US Congressional support would not have materialized.

For the long term, the most complex of the objectives, that of securing peace and stability in the region would have been virtually impossible without the active participation of coalition forces. It was essential that it be both a real and a perceived regional effort to solve a regional problem -- not just a thinly veiled form of US imperialism.

The importance of the coalition was not lost on Saddam. He correctly perceived it to be the center of gravity of the effort against him and assailed it using the full spectrum of political, psychological, and military means. Accordingly, the coalition leadership had to carefully assess the political consequences of any military decision to prevent Iraqi exploitation.

The Impact of Politics on Strategy

Before addressing the impact of political objectives on military strategy, it must be noted that General Schwarzkopf recognized an important caveat to the subordination of military means -- that the general be assured he could produce the political end with the available means[4].

While the development of a military strategy to meet US political objectives is well worth detailed discussion, the really unique aspect of the process was the parallel effort to accommodate Arab objectives.

The Arab political impact was felt almost immediately when General Schwarzkopf realized that his first mission was to solve the "cultural crisis" that loomed with the massive flow of US troops into the formerly closed kingdom of Saudi Arabia[5]. As the protector of the holy

cities on Mecca and Medina, King Fahd was intent on minimizing their impact on Arab culture and society. With Saddam's campaign to discredit the Arab coalition, the American leadership shared this concern. At every level, from the strategic to the tactical, cultural sensitivity would play a major part in the design and conduct of operations. General Schwarzkopf knew he could "win the war and lose the peace" if he didn't get it right.

Politics also drove the command relationship which would be in effect for the duration of the conflict[6]. Since neither Saudi Arabia nor the United States was willing to have its troops under the other's command, a joint structure was set up in which General Schwarzkopf and Khalid shared equal stature. While military theory and practical experience would argue against this arrangement, it was the only politically acceptable solution -- and in fact was remarkably effective.

During both Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Arab units were assigned missions more on in keeping with political constraints and imperatives than with military efficiency. Arab pride dictated that they hold positions in the front line to ensure theirs would be the first blood shed even though US reconnaissance and security elements would have been much more effective. The Arabs' self imposed prohibition against an attack into Iraq left no option but to send them into the teeth of the Iraqi defense. This was a significant constraint but it actually contributed to an important element in the long term stability of the region -- that there be no doubt that Arabs were fighting Arabs lest revisionists later distort history[7]. It also led quite easily to the decision that Arab forces be assigned the very visible and politically important mission of liberating Kuwait City[8].

It was not enough to simply assign meaningful missions to Arab forces, they also had to

win[9]. While many of the Arab units were well trained, led, equipped and motivated, to ensure success virtually every Iraqi division in their path was reduced to combat ineffectiveness during the air campaign. The fact that the enemy's operational center of gravity, the Republican Guard, was not as heavily targeted speaks eloquently of the influence of politics in the design of the ground and air campaigns[10]. The ground campaign was also carefully designed so that the US Marines would fight their way to the very outskirts of Kuwait City to facilitate the "liberation" by Arab forces and to be close at hand should anything go wrong.

Mid-Course Corrections

A key element of any strategy is the mechanism for mid-course correction. This is especially important in coalition warfare where the complexities of conflicting political objectives make it difficult to accurately predict the consequences of military strategy. It is also exceptionally difficult -- and all the more so without a combined command structure -- once the plan is set in motion. While the decision to shift from Desert Shield to Desert Storm in itself represents a dramatic mid-course correction, two examples from the latter illustrate the remarkable strategic flexibility demonstrated by the joint leadership in response to political pressure.

First was the monumental diplomatic and military effort necessary to keep the non-Arab states of Turkey and Iran, but most notably Israel, from entering the war. While it can be argued that proposed Israeli jet, attack helicopter, and commando raids would have been a useful military move, there is universal agreement that it would have been both a short- and a long-term political disaster. When Saddam fired Scuds at Israel in apparent fruition of his threat to

"incinerate" the northern half of the country, two important military steps were taken: first, the unprecedented deployment of US-manned Patriot missile systems to Israel, and second, a diversion of fully one third of the air sorties to "Scud Hunting" using Israeli target lists, even though US Air Force intelligence analysts knew they were pointless. Interestingly, Schwarzkopf knew that significant military returns would not accrue from this move, but he clearly understood that the psychological effect would accomplish the political objective[11]. Again, military efficiency was subordinated to political requirements.

The second, and perhaps most controversial mid-course correction came in the closing hours of the war with the decision not to complete the destruction of the Republican Guard when their remnants were pinned against the Euphrates. This politically- driven decision emanating from Washington must certainly have been based in part on the consideration of Arab interests[12]. Many were beginning to ask the question, "How many more Arabs must you kill?" as scenes of the "Highway of Death" were broadcast around the world. Furthermore, complete destruction of the Republican Guard might have loosened Saddam's grip on power, leading to the feared power vacuum.

A third opportunity for a mid-course correction occurred when unexpected rates of advance brought US Marines to the outskirts of Kuwait City well ahead of Arab forces. Military urgency dictated that the Marines go in to block the escape routes and prevent further destruction by Iraqi troops. However correct the move would have been from a military standpoint, the Marine commander recognized the possible political ramifications and sought permission to proceed. Reinforcing the political imperative that Arab forces liberate the city, Schwarzkopf denied permission but urged Prince Khalid to redouble his efforts[13]. While no correction was

made, the process was a model of sensitivity at all levels for subordination of military operations to political objectives.

Conclusion

General Schwarzkopf was the successful architect of victory in the Gulf War largely because he recognized the validity of two important elements of Clausewitzian theory -- that war is an extension of policy and that in war the military means must be subordinated to the political ends. Second, he was able to accommodate the sometimes conflicting political objectives of coalition governments through the careful design of military strategy. Certainly, if he had insisted on a strategy based solely on military expediency or solely on US political objectives it is quite possible he could have indeed won the war and lost the peace.

In a multipolar world, coalition warfare is the way ahead. The US cannot politically, economically, or militarily afford to go it alone as a world policeman. The development and execution of US political and military strategy in the Gulf set an important precedent and serves as a model for crisis reduction in this changing world. However, we must be careful not to see it as a template which can be overlaid on any region with the expectation of equally spectacular success. As Clausewitz reminds us, we must view historical examples not as prescriptions but rather as illustrations of the timeless concepts set forth in his works.

1. Bard E. O'Neill, Ilana Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Comparative Strategy,* Vol. 11, No. 2, 1992: p.225, Crane Russak, A Member of the Taylor & Francis Group.

2. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero,* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 332. "...the most pressing concern was neither the threat from Saddam nor the enormous joint military enterprise on which we were embarked. What loomed largest was the cultural crisis triggered by the sudden flood of Americans into their kingdom."

3. US Secretary of Defense Cheney, "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress," report submitted to Congress. April 1992. p. 40.

4. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero,* p.368, p.444. On several occasions, rather than succumb to political pressure to execute an ill-conceived plan with insufficient forces, he forcefully expressed his views and fought for necessary resources to accomplish the objective.

5. Ibid., 332. See note 2, above.

6. Ibid., p. 313, 329-30. Schwarzkopf placed great importance in the early decision to appoint Lieutenant General Prince Khalid Bin Al-Saud as the commander of the Arab coalition. He also set up a joint Saudi-US command center to ensure close trust and cooperation.

7. Ibid., p. 355. "...I wanted to make absolutely sure that if we took on Saddam, we would win not only on the battlefield but in the history books - and that included the *Arab* history books."

8. Ibid., p. 360. In discussing the results of the seminar mentioned in note 9 below, Schwarzkopf remarked, "From there, it was only a short step to what became an inviolable principle in our planning: in any ground war against Iraq, I told my staff, Arab forces must be the ones to liberate Kuwait City."

9. Ibid., p. 356. Schwarzkopf organized an "Arab reaction seminar" to determine the political acceptability of military moves against Iraq. The consensus was that virtually any offensive would be acceptable with two conditions: that Arab forces in significant numbers had to fight on our side and that we had to win.

10. From the author's personal observations of progress reports during the air campaign. Iraqi divisions facing Arab coalition forces were rated as combat ineffective at the start of the ground campaign whereas Republican Guard divisions were rated as 50-90% effective. The only explanation is that the political importance of Arab success outweighed the military importance of the destruction of the Iraqi operational center of gravity in the Kuwait theater.

11. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero,* pp. 417-418.

12. Ibid., p. 465. With growing public pressure to stop the apparently wanton slaughter of fleeing Iraqis, Schwarzkopf was requested to cease hostilities. "We still hadn't accomplished what we set out to do -- eliminate Iraq's ability to threaten the Arab world. Until we destroyed

the Republican Guard, our job was only half done..."

13. Ibid., p. 460. Schwarzkopf admits he was bluffing but he told Khalid, "The Marines are already asking permission to liberate Kuwait City. I can't hold them very long."